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Nuclear Test Ban

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Speech of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)
For Release Thursday A.M.s, July 4, 1957

Mr. President, the desirability of a test ban on big nuclear tests is the most controversial issue that confronts the nations of the world today. There are many proposals coming from the capitals of the world and from many prominent individuals. These proposals differ largely in matters of degree. The Soviet Union has made a number of attempts to seize the initiative in promoting a worldwide ban on nuclear tests. Propaganda or not, we must admit that these Soviet proposals have put the nations of the Free World on the defensive. It is time that the United States forcefully reassumes its leadership.

As I have stated on previous occasions I feel that a multilateral ban on the testing of nuclear weapons of one megaton or more in strength would be in the best interest of the peoples of the world, both from a defense and humanitarian point of view.

My views on this subject are known, as are the views of many of my colleagues here in the Senate. Many scientists and lay people have expressed their thoughts on this topic. What disturbs me greatly is whether this country, as the most powerful nation in the world, has a firm policy on this, the greatest of all issues. I really do not know and from all public sources of information I am forced to assume that the President, his associates and his advisers in the Administration are not unified in the formulation of a firm policy on the continued testing of nuclear weapons.

In November of 1956, President Eisenhower stated that he opposed a ban of any kind on the continued testing of nuclear weapons. On the eve of the 1956

presidential election, Dr. Edward Teller and Dr. Ernest Lawrence of the University of California Radiation Center issued a statement that "the radioactivity produced by the testing program is insignificant". This statement, though disputed by some, had considerable effect on the thinking of many people at that time.

In the months that have passed since the presidential election the growing support for some kind of a test ban has become very vocal and President Eisenhower has come to look more favorably upon the desirability of a nuclear test ban. Just recently Dr. Teller and Dr. Lawrence joined with the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission in reporting to the President that this country now knew a way of making virtually "clean" super-bombs in which the radio active fallout could be cut down by 96%. Prior to this announcement the Administration had committed itself to a ban on nuclear tests under stringent conditions as part of an overall disarmament program.

Now, however, the President has said that while he would still stand by the heavily conditioned United States offer to join in a ban on atomic tests, he thought there was much to be said for continuing tests in order to eliminate the fallout dangers to the fullest possible degree.

I might say at this point that regardless of the source of scientific information it would seem unreasonable to depend on only one source on such a vital issue. Advice from other learned scientists should also be considered. During the course of the recent Joint Atomic Energy Committee hearings, AEC scientist, Dr. Alvin C. Graves, testified that complete cleanliness in hydrogen bombs was impossible.

In recent weeks the "clean" bomb has been used as a major argument favoring the continued testing of large hydrogen weapons. Let us consider for a moment the various ramifications of a "clean" versus the "dirty" bomb.

I think the first important consideration is to recognize that if it is possible for this country to perfect a "clean" bomb, can we be assured that Great Britain, the Soviet Union and any other nation which would become a nuclear power would also be able to perfect "clean" bombs. We must remember that our nuclear test explosions are not the only ones which spawn radioactive particles into the atmosphere. Are we willing to give our formula to the Soviet Union so that she can continue her tests without contaminating the atmosphere?

Another point we must consider is that if we do perfect a bomb that is 95 or 96% "clean" the percentage that is still "dirty" in one of these bombs in the megaton range would still release more fallout than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Proponents of the "clean" bomb say that such bombs could be used tactically in battlefield operations without unnecessarily injuring civilians with fallout and without contaminating the ground so that invading troops could not enter. Conversely it could be argued that the "dirty" bomb is more desirable because it would contaminate an area for a long period of time making it inaccessible.

Because of the tremendous force embodied in a megaton bomb, that is, in terms of millions of tons of TNT, the initial destruction from the explosion and the heat creates total destruction over areas covering several miles. It would

seem difficult to limit a target to a specific military installation without bringing death and destruction to hundreds of thousands of innocent people.

I am not at all convinced that the use of a "clean" bomb would automatically displace the use of hydrogen weapons which would spread radioactive fallout over a large area.

We as Americans may not use "dirty" bombs but who is to say that the aggressor will do likewise. I feel that this yen to perfect "clean" bombs is leading us to an unattainable goal of perfection in war.

It is time for realism. The advantages and disadvantages of "clean" and "dirty" bombs will be cast to the winds if, God forbid, the world should become embroiled in another World War.

I feel that the greatest contribution to a worldwide disarmament program would be a multilateral agreement among the nuclear powers to end the testing of large hydrogen weapons of one megaton or more in strength. Such an agreement is enforceable because from all information available it would be impossible for any nation to test such a large weapon without being detected.

This I feel can be the first step in any sound disarmament program. It is virtually impossible to bring about a complete disarmament agreement among the major powers without approaching it on a step by step basis. The Administration is to be commended for proposing at the current Disarmament Conference in London a ban on nuclear tests for a 10-months' period if, at the same time, the Soviet Union will agree to stop the manufacture of such weapons. I would express the hope that should our proposal fail, because of an "all or nothing, take it or

leave it" basis, that negotiations would be continued in the hope that some small step-by-step agreement could be reached in this difficult and delicate field.

I want to make it clear that I do not suggest that we discontinue the testing and perfection of small tactical nuclear weapons. This is very necessary to maintain our military strength in the atomic age until there is an iron-clad disarmament agreement.